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Comparing Comparisons in Muslim Polemical Writings from Christian Iberia and Exile

Muḥammad al-Qaysī's *Kitāb Miftāḥ al-Dīn* and the Anonymous *Tratado de los dos caminos*

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ABSTRACT Comparison figures prominently in the polemics of the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula in premodern and early modern times. Its pervasiveness as a figure of thought in their sources raises the question of variety in regard to comparison—that is, the multiple expressions of comparison as well as its numerous uses—particularly in the field of polemics. This paper discusses the functions of comparison in polemics as a necessary first step to advance current knowledge of comparison as a historical practice in the making of one's identity and the definition of groups and individuals. The discussion will focus on writings by Muslims who lived in Christian Iberia. It will focus particularly on two anti-Christian polemics: that by the Tunisian author Muḥammad al-Qaysī in an as-yet unstudied Aljamiado copy (Spanish in Arabic characters); and the *Tratado de los dos caminos* (*Treatise of the Two Roads*), an early seventeenth-century work of Islamic doctrine by the so-called “Refugee in Tunisia”. The analysis of these two works will address the most important common points and differences between their respective polemical comparisons.

KEYWORDS Polemical Comparisons, Muslims in Christian Iberia, Moriscos, Exile, Tunisia, *Kitāb Miftāḥ al-Dīn*, *Tratado de los dos caminos*

Introduction

This paper discusses comparison in polemics, and it is specifically concerned with the various functions of comparison within polemics itself. Here, comparison is argued to be a discursive strategy and a form of social differentiation, an understanding that is substantiated by a number of examples, including that of the pre-modern Iberian Peninsula. We have evidence that comparison was a common practice in the territories—by ordinary people as well as by

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the elite—and was integral to enduring modes of thought among Christians, Muslims, and Jews. An exemplary case study is the writings against Christianity of two Muslim authors who spent their lives between Christian Iberia and North Africa (in particular, Tunisia) in the late medieval and early modern periods, respectively. Both authors are Muslim scholars who—for various reasons—forcibly left their places of origin. Both writers also enjoyed a certain prestige among their new audiences. Comparison is very present in their writings and unfolds against the backdrop of Islamic–Christian polemics. There are, however, significant differences between the two authors as well, accompanied by a distinctive focus on the attack on Christianity and the preservation of Muslim orthodoxy. The lives and works of these Muslim scholars lend themselves to comparison and bring the question of variety in polemical discourse to the fore. It therefore makes sense to discuss their works together (more details on these works are given below).

Furthermore, the most substantive reason to embark on such an inquiry is the central role that comparison plays in polemics. The editors of a recent volume about polemics qualify the pre-modern expressions of polemics as speech acts aimed at attacking a religious adversary, suggestive of violence, and ultimately seeking to establish the absolute truth (Suerbaum, Southcombe, and Thomson 2015). It should be noted here that polemics are integral parts of broader social practices that eventually became institutionalized¹ and reflected daily inter-community dynamics. More importantly, one should bear in mind that polemics were employed by different social actors—not only to disparage their religious opponents, but also as a tool in constructing the identity of the in-group.² This was often done by recourse to comparison, a practice that—in the case of Muslims who lived as religious minorities in the Christian territories—must be seen through the lens of sustained contact with Christians and Jews (who were also a religious minority). These contacts represent intimate but conflicting relations that assumed meaning against the background of the ongoing military struggle for political dominance of the territories, as well as the competition in the socio-economic and religious spheres between groups that, because of their disparate religious affiliation, also had different access to certain levels of well-being and advancement on the social ladder. Within a rapidly growing Christian society, Muslims (known as Mudejars) engaged in religious polemics and used comparison to compete for greater wealth. In the specific case of the Jews, Mudejars used comparison to compete for more favourable treatment by Christians. Competition and religious polemics lasted well into the early modern period and accompanied the growing application of Christian pressure on the Mudejars, who were forced to convert to Christianity and became Moriscos. In spite of having converted, the Moriscos were ultimately expelled from Spain between 1609 and 1614.³

This context makes it easy to understand how important it was for the communities to place themselves at the apex of a hierarchy of religious merit before God. It also facilitates our understanding of the significance of instrumental comparison in mobilizing the claims by individuals and groups who aimed to underline their position in society—and who also

- 1 Polemics as institutionalized practices by Christians at the time is discussed in detail by Novikoff (2013).
- 2 The importance of polemics for the construction of the identity of the Muslim religious minorities of the Christian territories of the Iberian Peninsula is emphasized by Colominas Aparicio (2018). It is precisely because of their social embeddedness that—as Steckel (2018) rightly notes—polemics have to be approached by taking an interdisciplinary perspective.
- 3 On these two communities, see Boswell (1977), Catlos (2004, 2014), García-Arenal and Wiegers (2014), Harvey (2005). On their interreligious polemics with Christians and Jews, see Cardaillac ([1977] 2004), Colominas Aparicio (2018), and the specific publications mentioned in the present article, particularly in notes 13 and 15 below.

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desired to emphasize positive differentiation and to underwrite the superiority of their own group and their own sacred history. It is certainly true that comparison could take many forms: for example, it could be direct, simple, or more elaborate as part of more complex discourses. Comparison could also be employed in a variety of areas of life and thought, such as, for example, scholarly and legal discourses, historiographical accounts, courtroom deliberation and argumentation, international relations, and even everyday conversation. Sometimes it could be accompanied by explicit or implicit insults intended to disparage one's religious opponent, as when Jews are compared to 'swine,' Muslims to 'dogs,' and Christians to 'heretics.'⁴ However, as Christina Brauner notes in the introduction to this special issue (2020), it is precisely "polemical comparisons" that place emphasis on *difference* where similarity or identity would be expected and where these polemical variants can be distinguished from their "ordinary" variant.⁵ It is in polemics that comparison serves to renegotiate community boundaries, both with regard to notions of religious doctrine and practice and with regard to the strategies of inclusion and exclusion of different social actors in the community.⁶ Comparisons were thus often employed to advance claims of religious exclusivity, which in and of themselves parenthetical are extremely powerful polemical devices that can be used both to reproduce existing power relationships and to call these relationships into question.

These considerations regarding comparison are important for the discussion that follows. [4] One of the works to be discussed is that of Muḥammad al-Qaysī, an early fourteenth-century religious scholar at the al-Zaytuna mosque in Tunis who became a prisoner of war in the Christian territories (research suggests Lleida, Catalonia, or South France as possible locations for his imprisonment, Van Koningsveld and Wiegers 1994, 179). During his captivity, he wrote a polemic against Christianity entitled the *Kitāb Miftāḥ al-Dīn wa-l-mujādala bayna-l-naṣārā wa-l-muslimīn min qawl al-anbiyā' wa-l-mursalin wa-l-ʿulamā' al-rashidīn qara'ū-l-anājil* (The Key of Religion).⁷ The second work analysed in this article is the *Tratado de los dos caminos* (Treatise of the Two Roads),⁸ and in this case we do not know the exact identity of its Morisco author.⁹ But we know that he, like many other converted Muslims, was expelled from the Iberian

4 See for these claims, *inter alia*, the association with pigs of Jews and Christians in the Muslim anti-Jewish polemic of the *Ta'yid al-milla* (The Fortification of the Faith, or Community) (Kassin 1969, 1:244; Colominas Aparicio 2018, 57n38 and 152–198 for the *Ta'yid*, more generally) and the Christian claims against Muslims, as quoted in Muslim anti-Christian polemics (Colominas Aparicio 2018, 199–239).

5 See also by the same author, together with Sita Steckel, Brauner and Steckel (2020).

6 An example would be that of Muslims who collaborated with Christians in collecting taxes from the Mudejar communities, or *aljamas*, and were compared to Christians. So was the attack on the late-fifteenth-century Mudejar *alguacil* (or the officer of the court) of the Mudejar community of Atajate, in Málaga, in charge of collecting taxes for the Crown of Castile (Alcien Almansa and López de Coca 2009, 69n48, quoting Archivo de la Catedral de Málaga, legajo 62, cuadro 21).

7 *The Key of Religion or the Disputation between Christians and Muslims from the Sayings of the Prophets, Messengers and Rightly Guided Prophets* as translated in Van Koningsveld and Wiegers (1994, 164–5).

8 All translations by the author unless indicated otherwise.

9 The work has been preserved in two manuscript copies: manuscript Gayangos S2 from the Real Academia de la Historia in Madrid and edited by Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva (2005); and manuscript II/1767 from the Royal Library (Real Biblioteca), also in Madrid; see the entry about this last manuscript by Álvarez Dopico (2010). There is some disagreement among scholars regarding the authorship of the work: whether it is anonymous, as claimed by the editors of Gayangos S2 (see Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005), or whether the author should be identified with the Toledan Morisco Ibrāhīm Ṭaybili (see the entry on this author and his works by Bernabé Pons 2017, and the references there). In the most recent publication on Ṭaybili, Teresa Soto González acknowledges the latter's involvement in the transmission of the copy in Gayangos S2 and, more importantly, provides a detailed discussion on the identification of this Morisco with the Toledan convert to Christianity, Juan Pérez (ca. 1562–?), which she accompanies with important data on the activities of polemics of Pérez (see Soto González 2019, especially 333–6).

Peninsula in the first decades of the seventeenth century. He worked as a religious scholar in Tunis, where, towards the middle of the century, he wrote this *Tratado* about Islamic doctrine (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005).

I will first briefly discuss a number of comparisons that are present in these two works. Based on this analysis, I will then explore differences and similarities in these comparisons by interrogating the practice of historical actors in the act of comparison. I propose the fundamental argument that a better understanding of how distinctions between individuals and groups are articulated through comparison in the polemical arena can serve to delineate the contours of comparison as an epistemic category and as a tool for analysis. Some preliminary results point in this direction. They strongly suggest that comparisons could be displayed at different levels that sometimes overlap and that al-Qaysī and the “Refugee of Tunisia” highlight certain elements of comparison while downplaying others. At the same time, comparison could serve different purposes and polemical *topoi*, and comparisons of the kind to which we have just referred (Christians as heretics, Jews as swine) could take on different meanings depending on the discursive contexts of use. Perhaps the most significant insight from this analysis is the emerging sense that although comparison may be expressed differently across intercommunity borders or within the in-group, such a difference is only one of many factors that impact the variety in the uses and functions of comparison. [5]

Prior to delving into an analysis of the texts, a methodological note is called for: namely, that caution is needed when approaching the terms used to refer to the groups investigated as historical actors, insofar as such terms have a complex genealogical relationship to the analytical terms used in historiographical analysis today. When I use the term ‘Christian’ as it was written in a ‘Muslim’ document, it is possible to establish that a distinction of religious importance is being made. But neither this distinction nor the sense of ‘religion’ attached to it are identical to current usages. This coming together of etic and emic uses makes the definition of the technical terms particularly difficult. While many comparisons negotiated religious difference—and thus served to indicate religious group identity and group belonging (in a way that still recurs today)—the connotations and meanings of comparisons also depended on particular historical contexts, such as habits, access to institutions and technology, and cultures of the body. It is still the task of a historian to question the functions of this terminology in individual cases and in controversial fields—for example, those of the transmission and formation of knowledge and philosophy. In these cases, the practice of comparison not only encompasses social relations and religious doctrines, but also covers issues that involve the construction of philosophical-scholarly traditions, as well as the different ways of relating ideas, terms, and concepts with interpretations and religious institutions. By taking such a perspective, comparison can be approached as being not only a valuable method for modern historiography, but also an anthropological form of shaping and re-shaping one’s identity and the definition of groups and individuals. [6]

The Anti-Christian Polemics of the Tunisian Captive Muḥammad al-Qaysī

The *Kitāb Miftāḥ al-Dīn* is an Arabic anti-Christian polemic written by the fourteenth-century Tunisian scholar Muḥammad al-Qaysī, composed during his captivity in the Christian territories of the Iberian Peninsula. Evidence from the preserved manuscripts indicates that shortly after its composition, the work was adapted from Arabic into Aljamiado (Romance in Ara- [7]

bic characters) by a Muslim—most likely a Mudejar—called al-Gharīb (or al-Gharibo). This adaptation apparently enjoyed long-standing popularity among Mudejars and Moriscos. Gerard Wiegers and Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld have discussed these adaptations, and most significantly, they identified and studied the Arabic original of al-Qaysī's polemic, which was probably composed in about 1309 CE and is preserved in a unique manuscript from Algiers (Algiers, National Library of Algeria, Ar. 1557). They also showed the important role al-Gharibo played in the transmission of the work among the members of these religious minority communities (Van Koningsveld and Wiegers 1994).

Al-Gharibo may have worked side-by-side with al-Qaysī, who was likely blind or had poor sight and thus may have needed some help in setting his work into text (Van Koningsveld and Wiegers 1994, 179). In choosing to adapt the work into Aljamiado, al-Gharibo was adhering to a cultural practice of some Mudejar and Morisco communities that gained momentum at the turn of the early modern period, especially in the north-western regions of the Crown of Aragon.¹⁰ Of the various copies dated between the fourteenth and the sixteenth century from the Christian territories, only manuscript 4944 from the National Library of Spain in Madrid has preserved the almost complete, yet disordered, adaptation of al-Qaysī's Arabic original.¹¹

Additionally, an unstudied Aljamiado manuscript of al-Qaysī's *Kitāb Miftāḥ al-Dīn* is part of a miscellaneous codex which most likely dates to the end of the sixteenth century and which is kept in the Colegio Escuelas Pías of Zaragoza (Zaragoza, Colegio Escuelas Pías de Zaragoza, Aljamiado 11 [Olim. D], Est. p. Tab V, No. 26, ff. 386r–398r).¹² This manuscript is of particular interest for the study of the transmission of the Aljamiado adaptations. It helps to provide a more detailed picture of the Aljamiado adaptations because it preserves the first two parts of the Arabic original and does so by maintaining internal order. Included is the story of *El rey Pablos, el judío* (King Paul, the Jew), as transmitted by the late-eighth-century historian Ṣayf ibn ʿUmar al-Tamīmī (Van Koningsveld and Sjoerd 1996; Anthony 2010), as well as a story entitled *Desconcordia de los cristianos* (Disagreement among the Christians).¹³ The internal evidence of the Zaragozan manuscript strongly suggests that it is a copy¹⁴ of the Arabic work by al-Qaysī, a work that can be divided into three large sections.¹⁵ Indeed, given

10 A classic study on the topic is Harvey (1958). See also Martínez de Castilla Muñoz (2010), Wiegers (1994).

11 For the various copies and the discussion of the Arabic original, see Van Koningsveld and Wiegers (1994, 186–8), also, Colominas Aparicio (2014).

12 Colominas Aparicio references this manuscript (2018, 74n21). The foliation is yet the one provided here. I worked from my own observations during my visits to Zaragoza. I have also consulted the description of the two Aljamiado volumes that are preserved in this institution by Oliver Brisville-Fertin, who has been so kind as to send me his works in press (Brisville-Fertin forthcoming).

13 For the edition and study of the Aljamiado adaptation preserved in Madrid, National Library of Spain, Aljamiado 4944, see Cardaillac (1972, vol. 2). It should be noted that the discovery of the original Arabic by Van Koningsveld and Wiegers (1994) forces the correction of various points in Cardaillac's analysis. The new data also sheds new light on some views expressed by another Cardaillac regarding this Aljamiado adaptation and its connection to other treatises of Muslim polemics from Christian Iberia (Cardaillac [1977] 2004, particularly 148–53, 201–3).

14 For example, the repetition of the words “el dicho el dicho” on f. 390v. I have carried out only a preliminary comparison with the rest of the manuscripts (in particular Madrid, National Library of Spain, Aljamiado 4944), and even though the name of al-Gharibo is not mentioned, it seems that we are indeed dealing with his adaptation.

15 I am using Van Koningsveld and Wiegers (1994) division of the work into three main sections. The first section deals with the history of divine revelation, which originally corresponds to Islam and has been ‘perverted’ by Christians. This section is headed with a discussion of passages from the Old Testament and is the one that is not included in the copy under discussion. The second section deals with some military confrontations between Christians and Muslims and with historical events that appear to be related to the

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that this Aljamiado adaptation stops at the end of the second subsection of the first part, one might ask whether the model that was used was also incomplete. A possibility is that the narratives included in the Zaragoza manuscript were more popular than the rest (and they therefore circulated independently). This is only guesswork, however, and the reason may simply be lost to modern historians.

Comparison appears to be the backbone of the two narratives of *El rey Pablos, el judío* and the *Desconcordia de los cristianos*, in which the focus is not only placed on the difference between religions, but also on the difference between members of the same religion. Islam is placed on the same level as Christianity, at least in terms of an Islamic understanding of Christianity that considers its beliefs and practices to have been corrupted in history, starting with the teachings of Jesus' disciples (particularly the apostles Paul and Peter). What is being claimed in these text is that the revelation of God to 'Īsā ibn Maryam, or Jesus in Islam, was in fact in accordance with the revelation given to Muḥammad, but that it was distorted and changed in the intervening period between the two revelations.¹⁶ Al-Qaysī states that the only group that preserved the original teachings of 'Īsā were the followers of *al-Mu'min* (the Believer). This claim is tied to the Qur'ānic perspective in which Christianity and Judaism are forms of proto-Islam and Abraham (Ibrāhīm) was the first *ḥanīf*, or believer in one single God. The story of *El rey Pablos, el judío* explains the reasons for the Christians' deviation and explicates the origins of the internal dissensions among Jacobites, Nestorians, and Melkites. This story is rooted, as Van Koningsveld has shown, in Islamic accounts. The narratives do not necessarily mention Paul, and other stories sometimes feature a Jew, referred to as 'Abd Allāh b. Saba', as the main character. This Jew is blamed for causing dissensions within Islam that lead to the schism between sunnah and shi'ah. This narrative proves to be an important example of the image of *King Paul*, who converts to Christianity and then perverts the beliefs and religious practices of the Christians (Van Koningsveld and Sjoerd 1996, especially 202–6). From an Islamic perspective, there cannot be “contrast” (or difference) with regards to the divine revelation. The Aljamiado adaptation of al-Qaysī's polemic renders contrast an impossibility when it states: “the Torah and the Gospels do not oppose each other because the book of God is all one and true.”¹⁷ This is a fundamental claim in the competition for the highest position within a hierarchy of religious excellence between competing systems which brings the believer closer to God and which, in the case of Islam, rests on the claim that God's revelation to Muḥammad has abrogated the previous revelations sent to Jews and Christians.

Highlighting the internal differences among non-Muslims—in this case, among Christians—not only serves to attack them, but it also strengthens the polemicist's position, as he can point out that even dissenters within the opponents' group align with his criticisms. An example of the use of this particular function of comparison is the second section in the other materials from the *Kitāb Miftāḥ al-Dīn* (not included in the Zaragoza copy), in which compar-

expulsion of the Templars (whose beliefs al-Qaysī places very close to Islam), and it ends with a poem. The third section focuses on the personal experiences of the author during his captivity and the religious polemics he held with a monk in front of a Christian king (Van Koningsveld and Wiegers 1994, especially 166). Szpiech (2018) provides an interesting comparison between the polemics by al-Qaysī and those by the well-known Christian, Ramon Llull (d. 1316).

16 One should note that 'Īsā (written as 'Īcā here) is also referred to in the manuscript as Jesus, for example, on f. 395r. For a discussion of the image of Paul in Morisco polemics, in which attention is paid to al-Qaysī's work and to its adaptation in manuscript Aljamiado 4944 from Madrid, National Library of Spain, see Szpiech (2012).

17 “no-se kont.rastaría ell-attawrāti i los avanجلي.os, porke l-kitāb d-Allah, todo es uno i.—es verdadero” (Car-dailac 1972, 2:217).

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ison also carries a certain weight. The Templars (*al-tanbaluh*)¹⁸ were viewed with suspicion by the Church and eventually banned. In the account by al-Tamīmī, the beliefs of the Templars are compared to the beliefs of the followers of *al-Mu'min*. The Templars are depicted as the defenders of God's unity and, as such, as proto-Muslims. It is, indeed, precisely the belief in this unity that puts a group of Christians (i.e. the Templars, who distance themselves from mainstream Christians and from tenets like the Trinity) on par with Muslims and Islam. Comparison here works in such a way that what is perceived as heretical from a Christian point of view is regarded as the right path for a Muslim.¹⁹

Although comparison is thus pervasive throughout, it is not approached as a practice to be embraced by the believer without risk. It is certainly praiseworthy to make an effort to understand God's revelation and to unveil the contradictions and falsities of Christian and Jewish beliefs, but comparison can also become odious if the tables are turned and claims that were used to incite hatred towards others are now directed against the Muslim community instead. Negative differentiation from the other groups by comparison served as a reaffirmation of faith, but the era in which the comparisons were formulated is marked by porous boundaries and conversion. Too much emphasis on common ground could cast doubt on the neophyte and could lead Muslims to abandon Islam (García-Arenal 2001).

An example that demonstrates how comparison was sometimes articulated alongside—or interwoven among—discourses shared by Muslims, Jews, and Christians is the Muslims' accusations against Christians of being *goim* (unbelievers), which, to my knowledge, is not found in al-Qaysī's Arabic original (Zaragoza, Colegio Escuelas Pías de Zaragoza, Aljamiado 11, f. 393v). Al-Gharibo uses the term *goim*, which has clear Hebrew origins and a strong resonance in Judeo-Christian polemics. He may have been a convert from Judaism, and we need to consider the role that the religious polemics with Christians could have played for a convert from Judaism to Islam as a possible avenue to explain the use of the term.²⁰ An example of the wide circulation of *goim* in this context can be found in Jean Calvin's commentary on the Book of Ezekiel, which is contemporaneous with some of the Aljamiado copies of al-Qaysī's work. In reference to Jews, he writes:

for they often call us ..., *goim*, 'Gentiles,' as if they called us 'profane,' 'rejected,' and altogether alienated from God. Lastly, this word *goim* means with them 'pollution' and 'abomination;' we are to the Jews like dung, and the off-scouring of the world, because we are *goim*. [...] Because the Scriptures more usually call foreigners *goim* who are not partakers of God's covenant, hence it became a mark of disgrace and reproach among the Jews. (Calvin 1849, 113–4)

Calvin's words make it clear that *goim* embodies everything to which Christians do not want to be compared. It is also possible that the comparison with unbelievers in the Aljamiado adaptations of al-Qaysī is doubly injurious to Christians. The meaning of *goim* itself is insulting enough, but in using it, Muslims are also taking recourse to a general terminology which is heavily loaded with connotations of Judeo-Christian polemics that were re-enacted

18 They depended upon the Hospitallers (the *al-ushbitāl*). See the notes about the author's lack of knowledge of the difference between Templars and Hospitallers in Van Koningsveld and Wiegers (1994, 172 and n44).

19 The same argument (that is, the closeness to Islam) is made by Christians to attack those who depart from Catholic doctrine and adopt positions that approach Protestantism, as is well illustrated in the case of the anti-Trinitarians (Socinians), who are eventually compared to Muslims (see Mulsow 2010).

20 There are other indications pointing in the same direction, yet there is no definitive answer to this question (see Colominas Aparicio 2014).

and appropriated—a vitriolic choice that could only have been seen with contempt by Christians. Remarkably, this comparison is still found in sixteenth-century Aljamiado copies of this anti-Christian polemic. During this period, the flesh-and-blood Jew was not attacked. Instead, the figures of thought about Jews and Judaism—which had become deeply ingrained in Christian society (Nirenberg 2002; Beaver 2016) and in Muslim polemical discourse (Colominas Aparicio 2018)—were criticised. The use of *goim* by the Mudejars and Moriscos could indeed be the result of their endorsement of Christian practices and anti-Jewish discourse, although evidence suggests that the term had become part of a vocabulary in which meaning was directly shaped by the members of the Muslims’ own communities themselves, both converts and otherwise.

Christians are compared to *goim* and are also accused of heresy (*herejía*), mainly because [16] of their inability to understand revelation. They are compared to donkeys (*ḥimār*): an “asno ke lieba libros” (“donkey that carries books”).²¹ The Zaragoza copy includes an abbreviated rendering of this comparison,²² but the basic idea is the same in the Arabic original and the Aljamiado adaptation. To wit, Christians read the books sent by God, but they do not understand them. The misunderstanding of the Scriptures lies at the basis of the Christians’ heresy, which is most heinous to Muslims. The following claim is plain in this regard: “There is no worse heresy and no worse saying than to witness that Allāh, Glory be to Him, is ‘Īḩā.”²³ It is not unreasonable to conjecture that Muslims also called Jews *herejes* in the same way that Christians are compared to *goim*, although to my knowledge there is no example of such a comparison for this region and period.

In addition, it is worth noting that the rebuttal of Christianity in the *Kitāb Miftāḥ al-Dīn* [17] does not elaborate to the same degree on Islamic normativity and practice, but rather, it takes advantage of comparison, particularly between the Christians’ sayings and their acts. Furthermore, in so far as such comparisons foreground difference, they also provide a compelling example of the polemical variant of comparisons. The polemic provides multiple examples of changes implemented by Christians. It is argued that Christians do not follow what they say, nor do they follow their own teachings, and they therefore commit great sins against God. Examples of such behaviour range from the improper conduct of friars and chaplains with women at church to the mixing of genders that is permitted at Christian prayers.²⁴ The grounds for the disapproval of gender-mixing at prayer services are unclear, and it is unknown whether the author of this polemic refers to the actual practices of the two communities in the

21 Cardaillac (1972, 2:41), Madrid, National Library of Spain, Aljamiado 4944, f. 45f. Algiers, National Library of Algeria, Ar. 1557, p. 57, lines 7–8.

فسجن الله ما اعمى ابصارهم بيدهم الانجيل يقرونه ولا يفهموه انما مثلهم كمثل الحمار يحمل اسفارا اصدق الله العظيم ورسول الكريم

The expression “ka-mathal al-ḥimār yaḥmilu asfāran” is well known by Muslims, as it is found in Qur. 62:5 and used by Arabic grammarians as an illustrative case study (e.g. in Ibn Ḥishām’s [d. 1359] *Mughnī al-labīb ‘an kutub al-a‘arīb*; see Grande 2013, 160). The translation of this verse into Castilian in the Qur’ān of Toledo (copied in 1606, the only known full translation of the Qur’ān from the Mudejars and the Moriscos) is very similar to the one in the copy before us, and so we read: “es como la semblança del asno que lleba la escritura /y no sabe lo que lleva” (López-Morillas 2011, 370).

22 Zaragoza, Colegio Escuelas Pías de Zaragoza, Aljamiado 11, f. 391r: “porque es grande maravilla que lien y no entienden.” When not quoting from secondary sources, my own transcriptions of the Aljamiado follow the conventions of CLEAM. The number of the foliation in this manuscript is indicated in the verso instead of the recto.

23 “y no ay peor erejia ni peor decir que atestiguar que Allāh subḥānahu es ‘Īḩā” (Zaragoza, Colegio Escuelas Pías de Zaragoza, Aljamiado 11, f. 394r).

24 Zaragoza, Colegio Escuelas Pías de Zaragoza, Aljamiado 11, f. 393r.

territories or whether he pushes for an ideal standard, instead. It should be kept in mind that there is evidence that before the expulsions, there were religious Morisco meetings in which sermons were read. Such evidence shows that these meetings could have been attended by men and women alike (yet we do not know for sure the extent to which the two genders physically mixed).²⁵ We also know that religious leadership roles were eventually held by women—and, thus, that women were consulted by men—such as, for example, the case of the so-called Mudejar Granadan *muftī*, the ‘mora de Úbera’ (the Moor from Úbeda) (Harvey 1958, 329). From a Muslim perspective, however, it is vitally important to substantiate the claim that Christians do not adhere to their own rules because this helps to validate the conduct of the in-group and to refute the Christians’ interpretations of Islam. These Christian interpretations of Islam, in turn, also frequently draw on comparisons between Islam and Christianity and are an example of the practice of ‘entangled polemics’ by which discourses both react to one another and borrow from one another, thereby producing similar and mirror-like images (see, *inter alia*, Lazarus-Yafeh 1992; Krech 2017).

While the data is not always equally strong in clarifying the specifics of the internal practices of the Mudejars and the Moriscos, the hypothesis is that the context and the conditions of their communities in the Christian territories put pressure on the Islamic rituals necessary for prayer and for conducting certain religious acts—for example, the *ṭuḥr* (state of purity) and the *wuḍūʿ* (minor ablution). Al-Qaysī notes that these are practices established by ʿĪsā, and he explains in detail how the Christians interpret such practices.²⁶ Christians compare the state of purity with the act of “clean[ing] the heart with confession and [distancing] oneself from small and big sins.”²⁷ The Christians’ argument states that: “when the heart is clean of sins then the body is also clean.”²⁸ The *wuḍūʿ* (or minor ablution) and, in particular, the *istinjāʾ* (or the cleaning of the body after the performance of bodily functions), are compared to refraining from sexual desires, that is, to not sinning “with oneself.”²⁹ Similarly, to clean the mouth, according to Christians, is to not “eat *ḥaram* (prohibited) things or say bad things,” and to clean the nose is to not “smell something *ḥaram* (prohibited),” because “if something is *ḥaram*, eating it is *ḥaram*, too, so smelling it is, too.”³⁰ The Christians, moreover, say that to rub the head (such as when cleaning one’s hair; *maṣḥar* in the text [f. 393r]; ar. *masaḥa*) is to lower it in front of God. To wash the ears is to “not listen to bad words,” and to wash the feet is “to walk only with the purpose of serving God.”³¹ The *Kitāb Miftāḥ al-Dīn* and its adaptations thus pay attention to the different parts of the body, which are listed one by

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25 The evidence of mixed sermons is discussed in Colominas Aparicio (2020). Regarding sermons in the Islamic world, see the important monographic study by Jones (2012); and on networks and collaboration among Muslims (often scholars) in the Christian territories, see Miller (2008) and Kadri, Moreno, and Arsuaga (2018).

26 Zaragoza, Colegio Escuelas Pías de Zaragoza, Aljamiado 11, f. 392v and ff.

27 “mas ellos dizen que-l-aṭahur que-s linbiar el-coraçon con la qonfesion y yel apartamiento de los pecados jicos y grandes” (Zaragoza, Colegio Escuelas Pías de Zaragoza, Aljamiado 11, f. 393r).

28 “y que quando es linbio el coraçon y claro de los pecados que-sta todo linbio el cuerpo linbio” (Zaragoza, Colegio Escuelas Pías de Zaragoza, Aljamiado 11, ff. 393r–393v).

29 “que se guarde la persona de hacer voltorio ni peçado con su persona” (Zaragoza, Colegio Escuelas Pías de Zaragoza, Aljamiado 11, f. 393v).

30 “que-l lavar de la boca es que se guarden de comer ninguna cosa ḥaram * ni dezir mal con su lengua * yel lavar de las narizes dizen que se guarden oler cosa ḥaram * que asi como es ḥaram * el comer de-llo es ḥaram el olerlo *” (Zaragoza, Colegio Escuelas Pías de Zaragoza, Aljamiado 11, f. 393v).

31 “y el masaḥar de la cabeça dizen que la deben abasar las jentes por miedo y vergüença del criador el labar de las orejas que no deben oir ni escuchar palabras de maldezir y los pïedes que no vayan ni anden con ellos sino en serviçio del criador” (Zaragoza, Colegio Escuelas Pías de Zaragoza, Aljamiado 11, ff. 393v–394r).

one (in the Madrid manuscript, a reference to the hands is also made).³² This suggests the importance of the knowledge of Islamic normativity to the Mudejar and Morisco communities and hints at the perceived risk that Christian practices could eventually replace Muslim conventions. Such fears are understandable—especially considering that members of such communities were regularly exposed to Christian preaching and proselytizing, as well as to attempts to suppress Islam. It is easy to discern the mechanisms by which practices known to Muslims could have been seen by Christians as appropriate starting points for a discourse that aimed to replace them with Christian beliefs and rituals. By comparison, the fundamentals of thought could be preserved and remain intact (i.e. the need to reach a state of purity), while introducing slight changes in practice (that is to say, by placing them within a Christian normative framework regarding rituals), as the example of the Christians’ interpretations of Islamic rituals on purity just discussed reveals. A learned scholar like al-Qaysī, even if he perceived the comparisons made by Christians as nonsense, would probably be aware that such an articulate Christian discourse could be powerful and therefore potentially dangerous for his Muslim co-religionists.

The *Tratado de los dos caminos* by the “Refugee in Tunisia”

Let us now turn our attention to the *Tratado de los dos caminos* (Treatise of the Two Roads), a work originally written in the Castilian language by a Morisco who was forced to abandon Spain for Tunisia. There, he composed a work addressed to his fellow exiles who needed knowledge of Islam in the Muslim land that welcomed them, but where they nonetheless encountered difficulties.³³ One of the most important struggles faced by the Moriscos was social rejection by the native population, who were sceptical of their different customs and resentful of the economic privileges enjoyed by the Moriscos as newcomers.³⁴ The “Refugee in Tunisia” was surely not oblivious to the two alternative life experiences of Morisco exiles. Throughout the introduction to the work, he presents the expulsions from Spain as a blessing from God and provides a detailed account of the abominable, dishonourable conditions under which they had been living in the Christian territories. In his eyes, Christians are heretics, and he considers the expulsion to be a favour that God bestowed upon him and his co-religionists, exclaiming: “thanks and praises be given to the pious Lord, who brought us out from among these Christian heretics.”³⁵ He compares the grace that God bestowed upon the Moriscos with the grace that God granted to the Jews when he freed them from Pharaoh, and he compares the inquisitors with the pharaohs, too (comparisons that, in the present context, should be read along the lines of the Moriscos’ release from the hardships under the rule of Spanish King Philip III, and the same applies to inquisitors) (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 49, 205). He argues that the most important difference between Jews and Muslims is

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32 Cardaillac (1972, 2:123) transcribing f. 66v (Madrid, National Library of Spain, Aljamiado 4944).

33 The work consists of different sections, among which there is a short novel entitled “el arrepentimiento del desdichado” (The Repentance of the Wretched). The Spanish title by which the work is known is currently given by the editors (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005) based on the contents of the first section.

34 It should be noted that tensions within the native Muslim community were not uncommon and were often articulated alongside ethnic-religious lines. We find examples in Maghrebi societies where converted Jews were rejected by their new Muslim co-religionists (see García-Arenal 1987; Ibn Zikri and Fenton 2016, especially 25–44).

35 “Las gracias y alabanzas sean dadas al piadoso señor, que nos sacó de entre estos erejes cristianos” (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 202).

that Muslims are grateful to God, whereas Jews are not. But as Luce López-Baralt notes, we also see how the author, in spite of all the adversities and hardships he experienced in Spain, is still fond of his previous life—above all, the rich and vibrant culture of its cities. He is an admirer of contemporary literature and poetry and quotes writers such as, *inter alia*, Lope de Vega, whose works and plays he knows intimately (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005).

Like in the polemics by al-Qaysī, comparison also serves as the axis of the composition by this Morisco author. This does not come as a surprise, since his entire discourse revolves around the dilemma of the choice between “two roads”: the right path, which leads to God, and the path that leads to doom. And yet, reading the work with a careful eye on comparison reveals several authorial techniques to craft his discourse and, more significantly, to metaphorically represent the relation between the believer and God. In the preface to the work, the protagonist plainly states that God: “shows him (i.e. men) two roads. One road is on the right hand: it is rough, with rocks, ravines, thorns, and thickets, but the deeds that are carried out on this path lead to rest and joy; the other road, on the left, is delightful and wide but ends in torment and sadness.”³⁶ The unencumbered way is compared to a city of pleasures, where men and women indulge the senses and commit innumerable carnal sins. In fact, the unencumbered way resembles one of the contemporaneous Spanish cities (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 97). The main character (who is likely the author himself) describes his experiences in the city as a visitor would. The “Refugee in Tunisia” leads us through “delightful gardens” (“jardines deleytosos”; Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 221); “a pathway of beautiful poplars” (“una alameda de hermosos álamos”; 222); “a mighty river” (“un caudaloso río”; 224); the “royal house” where the queen lives (“casa real”; 243); and the “house of music” (“casa de la música”; 244), among many other places. To him, this is a “beautiful city of tinsel and flowers” (“hermosa ciudad de oropel y flores”; 251), which is populated by young gentlemen and beautiful ladies. It is a road full of “tastes and entertainments so sweet and pleasant” (“los gustos y entretenimientos tan dulces y agradables”; 273). However, the protagonist is sharply aware that the pleasures he sees are ephemeral and perishable—and thus he wonders what the end of the road will be.

At the precise moment when the protagonist leaves the city behind and looks back, comparison goes beyond its heretofore descriptive function.³⁷ From the moment he embarks on the second path, comparison is consistently used to elicit contrast between what he saw in the city and what he sees now. From the top of the mountain, which he climbed with great difficulty because of the brambles and boulders along the way, the main character finds that all the gallants and ladies from the city—who had been young and richly dressed men and women—are now emaciated, old, and clad in ragged clothes. Some of them, as we come to know, walk as if they were “thirsty,” and “a pestilential smoke [comes] out of their mouths,” while he also sees “others with rotten tongues and eating poison” and still “others vomiting fire and other smelly blood-wrapped matter.”³⁸ The scene is highly emotional and extremely

36 “Dádole el conocimiento para adquirir en este mundo el fin que sea principio de eterna gloria o de perpetuo tormento, se le muestran dos caminos: el uno a la mano derecha, escabroso, de peñas, cañadas, espinos y abrojos, que paran sus trabajos en descanso y alegría; y el otro, a la mano izquierda, deleytable y anchuroso, que para en tormento y tristeza” (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 220).

37 The explanatory function is well illustrated in the comparison on page 250 (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005), where we read, “the woman is like ‘the sun in February, and the storm in August’”. My translation of “porque es la mujer como ‘el sol de febrero y tempestad de agosto’”.

38 “Sedientos [...] y d’ellos salía por la boca un humo pestilencial. Y otros con la lengua podrida y comiendo veneno” (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 174).

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powerful precisely because it describes in a concise but very vivid way what those who ignore God will encounter at the end of their lives. The torments of the easy path are beyond comparison to the earthly pleasures possibly enjoyed.

Taking this perspective as starting point, the *Tratado de los dos caminos* shifts its focus to the second road, which is mandatory for those who are obedient to God. The road may seem arduous at first, but in the end, it brings great reward. With the aim of explaining the correct way of Muslim life to the believer and the need to choose such a path over the superficial pleasures of the world, the *Tratado* devotes an entire chapter to comparing the earthly world with the heavenly one. We hear the “Refugee in Tunisia” say: “[L]ook at the amount of small stones, the earth, the mud, the dirt and viscosity of the ground of this world, and look at the musk, saffron topazes, hyacinths, diamonds and pearls of the other.”³⁹ All worldly pleasures that he previously perceived are nothing compared to what the Muslim believer will receive in the hereafter. But in order to obtain such rewards, he is required to comply with certain precepts and a specific way of life on the earthly plane. Comparison is used here to present a contrast which aims to excite the innermost recesses of the believer’s being, which can be seen as a preamble to facilitate the understanding of the urge to adhere to Islamic ethics—the detailed explanation of which is the core of the work. Indeed, such ethics are explained in detail at this point, although not by the main character. They are instead explained by the allegorical figure of “Understanding” (“Entendimiento”), who is represented by an old man. We also encounter this rhetorical technique in Christian and Jewish religious polemics which refer to the allegorical character of a sage who possesses understanding and judgment and often acts as an arbitrator, appealing to the reader to use his own understanding to discern truth from falsehood and to adhere to the “true” religion (although there are doubtless certain differences in the Christian and Jewish comparisons with respect to the case at hand).⁴⁰ “Understanding,” in the *Treatise of the Two Roads*, addresses questions such as Islamic marriage, the pillars of Islam, the virtues of the Muslim believer, and, of course, what is to come on the Day of Judgment. In contrast to the first path, through the earthly city, comparison here does not serve to distinguish the present from the absent (the earthly world from the afterlife) in the different “places” or “stances” of Muslim life in which the traveller stops. Rather, it is meant to evoke a distinction between the believer and the non-believer—the devout Muslim and he who deviates from the right path. In this part of the text, the comparison that deals with heresy does not stop in the aforementioned claims about Christians in the prologue (who, according to the author, are heretics, infidels, and idolaters); instead, it develops even further and acquires certain nuances.

It is important to consider that the term *hereje*, in line with cultural practices in Islam (Adang et al. 2016), is not only used in reference to Christians in the Mudejars’ and the Moriscos’ works, but also in reference to non-believers more generally. Furthermore, it additionally applies to deviant Muslims.⁴¹ Similar uses can be found in other Muslim religious polemics, and we can safely assume that this accusation would have been common in the peninsular

39 “Mira el casquixo, la tierra, lodo y çuçidad y bascosidad de los suelos d’este mundo. Y mira el suelo de almiçq, açafrán, topaçios, jaçintos, diamantes y perlas del otro” (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 488).

40 Two examples here are Ramon Llull’s Christian polemics entitled *Llibre del gentil e dels tres savis* (ca. 1274–1276) (The Book of the Gentile and the Three Sages) and the Hebrew anti-Christian *Sefer Ahitub ve-Salmon* (Book of ‘Ahitub and Salmon), which features a just queen of an island as its main character (see Szpiech 2011).

41 “Deviant” is used here to refer to those Muslims who are still believers but who, in some respects, act in ways that depart from what is considered to be normative by the mainstream.

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territories and would have been directed at anyone who in one way or another was perceived as not following the Islamic norms enforced in the period. The idea of heresy, however, is discussed here in a broader perspective. The Christian heretic is not only the Inquisitor who persecutes and punishes the bad practices of the new converts from Islam and Judaism, but is often also someone who is much closer and may even share a household with a Muslim—for example, his own parents. This could be true in the case of the neophyte, or convert to Islam, as well as in that of the Moriscos, who secretly practised Islam and had Christian parents (even if they were Christian as a result of coercion).⁴² Heretics are undoubtedly considered by the author to be the greatest sinners, followed by two kinds of sinners that the author views as equally evil: the wicked or perverse (*façineroso*) who are hated by God and those who do not fear God's judgement (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 384). This does not mean that heresy should be understood as the ultimate state of the person from which s/he cannot escape, for God's mercy can draw her/him out of it through repentance (2005, 387). Indeed, the repentance (*tauba*) of the heretic "is to become a Muslim."⁴³ One example of how the "Refugee in Tunisia" addresses the issue of *tauba* is found in the section on the virtues of being charitable—namely, the story of one such heretic to whom God appears in dreams and urges to relieve his debtors. The heretic follows God's will and subsequently converts to Islam. The strength of comparison in this example lies in the notion that if even a heretic can follow divine commands, then Muslims should be able to do so with even greater zeal (2005, 441–43). It is therefore an admonishing comparison, and the believer is called to reflect upon these issues.

On the one hand, heresy does not necessarily apply to Christians or Jews alone. It can also be articulated along in-group boundaries. Comparison serves to differentiate among Muslims, particularly those who embrace perspectives that conflict with the views of Sunnī Islam. In the sections devoted to free will, we see that the "Refugee in Tunisia" compares philosophers with heretics, stating that they are "knowingly heretics" because they believe that natural phenomena (such as ignition by fire) act by themselves, and in doing so, "they give God a

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42 The question that is raised here is how Muslims should respect the Islamic obligation to obey their parents in the case that they are, for example, unbelievers. The author clarifies that obedience to one's parents is mandatory, "even if they are heretics, but they will not be obeyed in things that they (the Muslim son or daughter) are commanded to do by God, as if they command him or her to do some sin or want to draw him or her into the heresy they profess" ("Y así mesmo, si son erexes, pero estos tales no serán obedeçidos en cosas que el manden haçer que sean prohibidas en la ley [151r] de Dios, como si le mandan haçer algún pecado o querelle atraer a la erexía que profesan", Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 368). The situation is more complex when the individual who is Christian is the mother (as is well known, Islam allows Muslim men to marry Christian and Jewish women). This is a point that the author explicitly discusses when he says: "and all kinds of women are equal in this, whether they be Jews or Christians or Muslims, whether they be slaves of others, or whether they be free, because a Muslim (man) is free to marry any of them" (my translation of Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 297: "Y todo jénero de mujeres son yguales en esto, ora sean judías o cristianas o muçlimas, ora sean esclabas de otro o sean libres, porque con qualquiera d'estas le pasa al muçlim casarsse"). If the mother asks to be taken to church, the author notes, there are two different opinions—both positive and negative—in Muslim jurisprudence, but if she asks to have something to give to the Pope or to adorn the church, it is generally held that this should be denied to her. On the other hand, with regard to the supplication to God, or *du'ā'*, the author warns: "only the Muslim sons do not make *du'ā'* to their parents, the heretics, after death, because they (i.e. the parents) are condemned without remedy" ("Sólo los hijos muçlimes no les pasa haçer du'a a sus padres los erejes, después de muertos, porque están condenados sin remedio," Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 306).

43 "Y el erexe es su tauba el bolberse muçlim" (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 424).

companion.”⁴⁴ On the other hand, with regard to the “innovators in the law” (what is known as *bid‘a* in Islam), the “Refugee in Tunisia” tells us that there are two kinds of opinions and that these are sometimes considered heretical, and sometimes not.⁴⁵ In addition, the author considers heretics to be those who go against God’s dictum on issues such as marriage or the obligations placed upon men who are married to two or more women (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 293).

The *Tratado* contains another comparison that appears to be even more resounding. At the very beginning of the work, directly following the prologue, the believer is compared to a walled city which is ruled by a monarch (i.e. God). The city court is God’s heart; God’s bed—theology—is in the royal rooms; God’s companions and entertainment are science; and God’s secret friend is prayer. The Devil is the ruler of the enemies of the believer. If the believer is able to defeat the Devil, “he will have triumph and victory, and remain in His (God’s) royal and sumptuous palaces of eternal glory.”⁴⁶ Not only the city, but also the believer, embody comparison: he carries within him the dilemma of the two paths, one of earthly pleasures and one of Muslim obligations, which is based on the distinction between the believer and the non-believer (or deviating believer). In doing so, the comparison functions here in an entirely different way than in al-Qaysī. If, in al-Qaysī’s polemic, we find a juxtaposition and opposition of various elements that the reader (or the listener) encounters as the text progresses, comparison in the *Tratado* is—in and of itself—the main framework on which the author’s discourse is built. Comparison is always present, yet it is not always made explicit, at least not at the outset. Only when the reader or the listener reflects about the teachings he has read or heard, after having travelled the two paths and having completed the journey, can he grasp the important place that comparison takes in the work with all its significance. He can then compare and properly judge what he will really get out of walking each of these two paths. It is at the end of the treatise (and, if metaphorically understood, at the end of an individual’s life) when his knowledge of God’s rewards and punishments is complete. Such knowledge offers him the possibility to compare and—with careful reflection—to choose between the two roads.

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Comparing Comparisons

The question we have addressed thus far—regarding the different approaches, uses, and functions of comparison in the polemics by al-Qaysī and in the treatise by the “Refugee in Tunisia”—can be pushed a little bit further. To do so, it is necessary to first recall the obvious—namely, that we are dealing with authors who lived in different historical settings, followed different biographical trajectories, and pursued different aims when composing their respective works. We also need to bear in mind, along with the various important differences, that the Tunisian scholar al-Qaysī arrived on the peninsula, where he was taken captive in

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44 “Se dan por erejes conocidos,” and “en el obrar, dan compañero a Dios” (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 421).

45 “Ynobadores en la ley” (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 421). On this issue, the author adheres to extended ideas of Mālikism about divine will. As is well known, such ideas were also supported by thinkers such as al-Ghazzālī (see Mālik b. Anas 2019, 737–40; De Cillis 2014). It is not only a subject of intrareligious polemics, but also of interreligious polemics with Christians and Jews that is found in Mudejar works, as well. For a discussion of the topic in Mudejar polemics, see Colominas Aparicio (2018).

46 “Saldrá con el trunfo y la bictoria, y quedará en sus alcáçares reales y sumtuosos de la Gloria eterna” (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 492).

the Christian territories, whereas the “Refugee in Tunisia” abandoned these territories and headed towards North Africa. Al-Qaysī was an outsider to the Christian territories, and hence he was an outsider to the Mudejars’ lifestyle as well—at least when he arrived. And yet, he elaborated upon an exposition of the errors of Christianity that achieved great popularity in its adapted form among the Mudejar communities and among the Moriscos, thanks to the adaptation by al-Gharibo. From this evidence, we can safely claim that the learned arguments made by al-Qaysī (based on his knowledge as a scholar in a Muslim land) were exploited in the particular context of their groups because the Mudejar and Morisco religious leaders found them useful in their relations and polemical encounters with Christians and Jews. For his part, the “Refugee in Tunisia” was also an outsider—although in Tunisia. He used the knowledge acquired in the Christian territories to comfort the Morisco exiles—in a majority Muslim environment that was sometimes hostile—as well as to deal with his own personal feelings and his yearnings for Spain. The lives of these two Muslim writers are, in many respects, the reverse of each other.

When we consider comparison in these two cases, we could say that polemics are not completely absent in either case; however, they are articulated differently. Indeed, al-Qaysī pursues polemical comparison through the detailed elaboration of the beliefs and practices of Christianity, and in such an elaboration the religious opponent is placed in the spotlight. Islam is no doubt important, but his discourse is mainly focused on the explanation of the beliefs of the Christian ‘Other’ and the claims of the Other against Islam: it provides direct arguments that can be used in real meetings to refute the attacks of non-Muslims. Here, we often find expressions such as “know, that”; “know, brother”; or “the answer is to tell them,” which have a didactic aim for Muslims and an admonishing one for their religious opponents (here, the Christians).⁴⁷ This use of contrastive comparison has the function of demarcating the lines between communities within a society which had shared and entangled cultural structures and modes of thought and polemics. [27]

I would like to suggest that in the case of the “Refugee in Tunisia,” the uses of polemical comparison take a slightly different course and reflect the internal conflict of the author, which is illustrated in his contempt as well as in his admiration for the Christian society in which he grew up and to which he fully belongs. The two paths that the believer encounters can be compared with the author’s own life trajectory, which dramatically splits into two. From being a Muslim convert in a Christian society—a society that is increasingly reluctant to accept the presence of the Moriscos as subjects of the state and any cultural or social expression that is somehow perceived as linked to the practice of Islam—he becomes a religious authority in Tunis. If he was already a religious scholar in Spain, in the Muslim territories, he could now practice Islam in public. Yet he maintains a defensive perspective in his new home, and most of his attention is devoted to Islamic doctrine as part of a discourse filled with clear anti-Christian polemical undertones. The ‘heresies’ of the Christians, as he calls the Christian practices and morals, are important insofar as they can be compared with a life lived according to the precepts of Islam—namely, the narrow and difficult path on the right hand. Unlike in al-Qaysī’s work, comparison is not used to elaborate upon Christian practices and beliefs. Here, comparison addresses both Spanish and Tunisian societies in their entirety. The author, however, shifts his focus: his outline of Spanish society revolves around cultural-religious coordinates, but the portrait of Tunisian society is much less nuanced. There are no [28]

47 “I sabed ke,” “Sepas, ermano, ke si tu ki.eres espuṭar con goím,” “La-repu.esta es ke” (Cardaillac 1972, 2:119, 127, 129, respectively).

references to the cultural practices of Tunisian people, and one might wonder whether he consciously glossed over practices that were regarded as a source of friction with the Muslim inhabitants of the region, which may have exposed dissensions within the community of Muslim believers. His interest is fundamentally to admonish his co-religionists—to draw the boundaries of Islamic ethical behaviour through the use of moralizing and didactic examples and stories in which the comparison is at the service of instruction within the communities and at the service of the Muslim as a believer. Comparison only serves secondarily as a tool in relations with the Other.

To summarize, a number of observations about the practices of the discussed form of polemical comparisons can be made. One such observation is that direct comparisons (X is like Y) are common. In relation to Christians, we find a number of comparisons that aim to downgrade them—for example, stating that they are “damn dogs, enemies of the truth.”⁴⁸ However, the evidence in the texts discussed here and in the literature of polemics more generally suggests that comparisons that are intended to insult are not abundant. The most common of such comparisons are the accusations of being a heretic (*hereje*) and a disbeliever (*descreyente*). It is precisely the term *hereje*, discussed above, that leads to our second observation: it is difficult to trace the genealogy of meanings from comparisons unless the task is carried out in a systematic, exhaustive manner. This is in line with recent scholarly insights that terms that are semantically related are not necessarily closer (as far as comparison is concerned) than others which are different but belong to similar structures (see, *inter alia*, Espagne 1994; Kocka 2003). Moreover, we must also consider the warning that the term heretic “does not have a precise parallel in Arabic sources.” Instead, a variety of terms are used (*zandaqa*, *kufr*, *bid‘a*, *ilhād*, etc.), serving as a well-known and important reminder of the drawbacks of employing an epistemology that has Christian-based, Western roots for the study of Islam.⁴⁹ Therefore, it can be misleading to think, all too readily, that *hereje* in al-Qaysi’s and in the “Refugee in Tunisia’s” works has the same meaning, beyond the broad sense of deviation from Islamic norms and practices (Fierro 2013, 57). It is probably safe to assume that the same comparison about Christians had a different resonance in the Christian territories than in Tunis. Likewise, the term had different functions in a context in which Muslims were accused of heresy and persecuted because of it than in a context in which they belonged to the majority. The same can be said about *goim*, whose precise meaning was surely understood differently by Calvin than by the Mudejars and the Moriscos, as well as the readers and listeners of their works. [29]

What comparison truly seems to do is to sharpen the differences between the competing religious systems of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, and to affect the perception of distances between groups—in our case, enlarging that distance in favour of the Muslims. It is used to demonstrate the excellence of Islam in various ways. On the one hand, it holds that Islam is the last and most perfect of the revelations sent by God to mankind and that Muhammad is the seal of prophets. On the other hand, it emphasizes dissent within Christianity and Judaism as the main reason for the change of God’s mandates by their communities, as well as their corruption. It has been argued that this polemical device serves to attack non-Muslims and heterodox Muslims alike and is in line with the claim made above—that in Islam, *there cannot be “contrast” or difference with regards to the divine revelation*. By following these two avenues, Islam is defined as an all-encompassing religious system that excels above the others; indeed, [30]

48 “Malditos perros, enemigos de la verdad” (Galmés de Fuentes and Villaverde Amieva 2005, 196, 52).

49 As noted by Fierro (2013, 57), for a case study of the employment of Islamic vocabulary of heresy, see Brentjes (2016, 147).

it is effectively claimed to be beyond comparison. It is remarkable that the ultimate rejection of the possibility of comparison within “true” religion is largely sustained by the systematic use of comparison in the first place.

The discussion of comparison provided in this article gives us some sense of its boundaries as an epistemic category and analytical tool. It shows that the same comparisons are often recalled when attacking the religious Other or the in-group and, hence, that variety in its uses and functions depends on a number of factors other than the inter-/intrareligious divide. Strategic uses of comparison seem to be key to assessing how the comparative lens effectively served the purpose of social differentiation between communities (and it was used in particular to negotiate the identity of the religious minorities of the Mudejars and the Moriscos) in a context marked by religious and cultural diversity, international contacts, and the transfer of goods and knowledge in the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa.

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